

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2531

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 1586

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CPRS, PINT, GT

SUBJECT: STATUS OF GOG'S INTENDED EXPULSION OF FOREIGN PRIESTS

REF: GUATEMALA 1508

1. ON MARCH 17, EMBASSY OFFICER DISCUSSED GOG'S INTENDED EXPULSION OF 11 FOREIGN PRIESTS (INCLUDING 3 AMERICAN MARYKNOLLERS) WITH JOHN BREEN, REGIONAL SUPERIOR OF MARYKNOLL FATHERS FOR GUATEMALA AND SALVADOR. BREEN SAID HE IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT GOG'S EXPULSION ORDER (WHICH REQUIRES PRIESTS TO DEPART BY MARCH 29) AND ITS DIRECT ACCUSATION OF POLITICAL MEDDLING. HE REJECTED THE ACCUSATION AS UNFOUNDED AND SAID HE INTENDS TO WORK TOWARD A REVERSAL OF THE ORDER THROUGH QUIET, BEHIND-THE-SCENES MARSHALLING OF PRESSURE AGAINST THE GOG. BREEN BELIEVES THAT ANY PUBLIC AIRING OF PROBLEM WILL BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE AND INTENDS TO MAKE NO DETAILS OF DISPUTE PUBLIC, INCLUDING THE NAMES OF THE PRIESTS.

2. FRG AMBASSADOR WOLFRAM HUCKE TOLD AMBASSADOR ON MARCH 18 THAT HE HAD SENT FORMAL NOTE TO FOREIGN MINISTRY REGARDING THE GERMAN PRIESTS INVOLVED. HIS NOTE "ACKNOWLEDGED" GOG'S RIGHT TO EXPEL RESIDENT FOREIGNERS NOT TO ITS LIKING, BUT REQUESTED DETAILS ON EXACT CHARGES LEVELED AGAINST THE GERMAN

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PRIESTS. RECENTLY ARRIVED PAPAL NUNCIO EMMANUEL GERADA ALSO

TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT HE EXPECTS TO SEE PRESIDENT ARANA SHORTLY TO REQUEST RECONSIDERATION OF EXPULSION ORDER AND WILL ADVISE US OF RESULTS OF HIS MEETING.

3. MARCH 18 AND 19 PRESS CARRIED ARTICLES ON EXPULSION ORDER CENTERING ON STATEMENT MADE BY GUATEMALAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE. ACCORDING TO PRESS , CATHOLIC BISHOPS RESPONDED TO STATEMENTS REPORTEDLY MADE BY PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS MARIO SANDOVAL AND DIRECTOR OF IMMIGRATION CARLOS LEMUS IN WHICH THE TWO ACCUSED THE BISHOPS OF BEING LIARS. BISHOPS' STATEMENT CALLED GOG ACCUSATION OF POLITICAL MEDDLING BY FOREIGN PRIESTS "NOT TRUE." STATEMENT WENT ON TO SAY THAT "THE BISHOPS PROFOUNDLY LAMENT THAT HIGH RANKING AUTHORITIES OF THE NATION... DISTORT THE FACTS AND THUS CAUSE A USELESS AND PAINFUL CONFRONTATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE PRECISELY WHEN ALL OF US WHO LOVE GUATEMALA SHOULD BE MAKING A GREAT EFFORT TO FIND WAYS TO A TRUE, NATIONAL PEACE." THE STATEMENT ADDS NOTE OF HOPE THAT "HIGHEST AUTHORITIES" WILL RECONSIDER THE MEASURES ADOPTED. IN A COMPANION ARTICLE IN LA NACION, JUAN GERARDI, BISHOP OF THE VERAPACES AND PRESIDENT OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT BISHOPS ARE GUARANTORS OF FOREIGN PRIESTS IN GUATEMALA AND THUS MUST DEFEND THEM "IF AN ANOMALOUS SITUATION EXISTS." GERARDI ALSO SAID THAT ACCUSATION THAT BISHOPS HAVE LIED MUST BE RECTIFIED IF CHURCH IS TO CONTINUE ENJOYING CONFIDENCE OF FAITHFUL. ARTICLE ALSO NOTED (SE SABE) THAT THREE OF PRIESTS WERE MARYKOLLER JOSEPH TOWLE, A FATHER VARELA, AND SIGRIDO FLEINER, A GERMAN. MARCH 19 EL GRAFICO CARRIED PAID AD PUBLISHING TELEGRAM OF FLEINER TO PRESIDENT ARANA ASKING FOR PERSONAL INTERVIEW TO CLARIFY CHARGES AGAINST HIM.

4. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT BREEN'S APPROACH PROBABLY WAS WISEST COURSE OF ACTION, BUT HE MAY ALREADY BE OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS. THE GERMANS SEEM BENT ON OFFENDING THE GOG, WHILE THE GUATEMALAN BISHOPS APPEAR TO HAVE DECIDED THAT THEY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO PUBLICLY DENOUNCE THE EXPULSIONS
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AS WELL AS STATEMENTS BY GOG OFFICIALS THAT ARE UNFAVORABLE TO CHURCH. CHURCH'S DECISION MAKERS IN THIS AFFAIR ARE THE BISHOPS THEMSELVES AND THE PAPAL NUNCIO. BREEN WILL BE OBLIGED TO ACCOMMODATE HIMSELF TO WHATEVER STRATEGY THEY ADOPT. IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THE CHURCH HAS DECIDED TO GO TO THE MAT OVER ISSUE. WE ARE AWAITING REPORT OF RESULTS NUNCIO'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BEFORE DECIDING WHAT COURSE OF ACTION WOULD

BE MOST USEFUL ON OUR PART.

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